

VERLAG KARL ALBER 

The culture and philosophy of the 20th century present the philosophical question of truth, its validity, its sources as well as the role it plays in human behavior in the most challenging of ways. The 20th century saw the rise of new religious movements that called into question traditional notions of religious faith while considering in new and radical ways the relation between faith and the presumption of human sovereignty. At the same time, the Jewish people too entered a new age. Facing such 20th century movements as socialism, nationalism and secularism amidst the need to grapple with events of mass immigration and the challenges of social integration and acculturation, Jews had to rethink their notions of past, present and future, while Jewish philosophers were called upon to re-define the essence and meaning of Jewish life. The essays in this volume present Franz Rosenzweig's philosophy as one which stands at the nexus of all these questions, showing how it offered new paths of thought for 20th and 21st century Jews, Christians and others.

Prof. Yehoyada Amir Ph.D. is an Associate Professor for Jewish Thought at Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion in Jerusalem and a board member of the International Rosenzweig Society.

Prof. Yossi (Joseph) Turner Ph.D. is an Associate Professor of Modern Jewish Thought and Philosophy at the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem and a member of the Advisory Board of the International Rosenzweig Society.

Dr. Martin Brassler teaches at the Lucerne University of Applied Sciences (Switzerland). He is director of the Philosophy+Management PLC and a board member of the International Rosenzweig Society.

Yehoyada Amir

Yossi Turner

Martin Brassler (Hg.)

Faith, Truth, and Reason

ROSENZWEIGIANA

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Martin Brasser, Norbert Samuelson und
Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik

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Yehoyada Amir
Yossi Turner
Martin Brassler (Hg.)

Faith, Truth, and Reason

New Perspectives on
Franz Rosenzweig's
»Star of Redemption«

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Inhalt

Forward	11
<i>Wolfdietrich Schmied-Kowarzik</i> Vom Gottesbeweis zum Erweis Gottes	15
<i>Yehoyada Amir</i> Rosenzweig's <i>Büchlein vom gesunden und kranken</i> <i>Menschenverstand</i> as a Prolegomena	37
<i>Luc Anckaert</i> The Transcendental Possibility of Experience in Rosenzweig and Levinas	61
<i>Caspar Battegay</i> Kritik des reinen Lebens. Die Rede vom Blut in Franz Rosenzweigs <i>Stern der Erlösung</i>	83
<i>Hanoch Ben-Pazi</i> Love Discourse: Rosenzweig vs. Plato. <i>The Banquet:</i> <i>Song of Songs</i> , the <i>Symposium</i> and the <i>Star of Redemption</i>	105
<i>Martin Brassler</i> „... nur das rechte blitzt“. Das Motiv des Angesichts und des Antlitzes im <i>Stern der Erlösung</i> von Franz Rosenzweig ..	125
<i>Ari Bursztein</i> Mending <i>The Star of Redemption</i> in Emil Fackenheim's Philosophy	137
<i>Jonathan Cohen</i> Liberation or Limitation? Strauss' Critique of Rosenzweig on the Question of Law	155

<i>Hans Martin Dober</i> Franz Rosenzweigs <i>Der Stern der Erlösung</i> als liturgietheoretische Konzeption	185
<i>Ottfried Fraise</i> Das Licht des Geistes und das Licht der Erlösung. Ein Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Idealismus und rabbinischer Tradition in Franz Rosenzweigs <i>Stern der Erlösung</i>	203
<i>Martin Fricke</i> Tillich und Rosenzweig: Korrelation als Grundfigur neuen Religionsdenkens	223
<i>Wayne J. Froman</i> The Sense of Creation and Its Role in <i>The Star of Redemption</i>	245
<i>Barbara E. Galli</i> Poetics of Time in Rosenzweig and Kafka	259
<i>Angel E. Garrido-Maturano</i> Das Gebet als ereignishafter Weg zur Wahrheit. Bemerkungen über die Rosenzweigsche Auffassung des Gebetes	277
<i>Michael Gormann-Thelen</i> „Kugelförmig“ – <i>Der Stern der Erlösung</i> . Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Randgänge	303
<i>Irene Kajon</i> The concept of Vertrauen in <i>The Star of Redemption</i> : Rosenzweig and Spinoza	315
<i>Katrin Jona Kirchner</i> Experience, the Principle of Relativity and the Function of Language in the Conceptions of Franz Rosenzweig and Alfred N. Whitehead	333
<i>Sandra Lehmann</i> Glaube und Geschichte in Franz Rosenzweigs <i>Stern der Erlösung</i>	355

Inhalt	9
<i>Michael Löwy</i> Walter Benjamin and Franz Rosenzweig. Messianism against „Progress“	373
<i>Zohar Maor</i> Redemption and Law: Rosenzweig’s Critique on Max Brod	391
<i>Barbara U. Meyer</i> Walking the Way of the Star: Paul van Buren	409
<i>Thomas Meyer</i> Franz Rosenzweig in ausgewählten Theologiediskursen seiner Zeit	423
<i>Olivia Mitscherlich</i> Glauben und Wissen. Rosenzweigs Entwurf philosophisch- theologischer Lebensorientierung	447
<i>Gesine Palmer</i> „Letztes Erkennen richtet“. Rosenzweigs Begriff von Erkenntnis im <i>Stern</i> und in „Apologetisches Denken“	471
<i>Michele Del Prete</i> Über die Wahrheit des <i>gesunden Menschenverstandes</i> : Zu Rosenzweigs <i>theologia naturalis</i>	481
<i>Renate Schindler</i> Im Spannungsfeld zwischen Philosophie und Theologie Zu Franz Rosenzweigs Zeittheorie des Wunders und der Erlösung	493
<i>Yossi Turner</i> Language, Faith and Ethics in Rosenzweig’s Thought and its Implications for Contemporary Society	511
<i>Hartwig Wiedebach</i> Gestalten des Zwischen: Franz Rosenzweigs Weisheitslehre	525

Jewish Existence in History:
An Inquiry into the Thought of
Franz Rosenzweig and Beyond

Introduction	551
<i>Eliezer Schweid</i>	
Is Franz Rosenzweig's Thought Relevant to Our Time?	553
<i>Yossef Schwartz</i>	
From Religious Pluralism to the Clash of Civilizations The Contemporary Dimension in Rosenzweig's Philosophy	573
Often used abbreviations of Rosenzweig's Writings	591
Index of Names	593

Forward

From the outset of Western philosophy, understandings of „truth“ and „reason“ have always been deeply intertwined with ethical questions of good and felicitous life. In certain periods of time, beginning with Plato and Aristotle, ethical behaviour and its corollary – the proper ordering of society – have been viewed as the necessary condition for pursuing an adequate knowledge of truth and the achievement of human intellectual perfection.

Following the adoption of biblical religion – particularly in the Middle Ages – discussions of the relationship obtaining between truth and ethics became bound to the most deep-seated notions of metaphysical reality, human reason and divine will. These discussions were, for the most part, rooted in fundamental theosophical presuppositions pertaining to the existence of an orderly universe that can be known by the human mind even as its basic structure was forever determined by divine will. In this context, the interplay of Faith, Truth and Reason appeared to be forever solidified in the context of classic philosophical understandings in the realm of metaphysics and theology. In this manner, the various understandings of truth and ethics not only remained intimately intertwined but their inner-connectedness appeared to be more formidable than ever, in so far as they were thought to be rooted in the absoluteness of divine being, thought and activity.

Of course, the Kantian revolution which came at the end of the 18'th century did much to dissolve the previous monolithic approach of Western philosophy. It epistemologically limited the ability of „theoretical reason“ to crown its search for truth in the metaphysical realm with any kind of rational certitude, and at the same time separated from that search the basis for ethical activity, relegating ethics to the realm of „practical reason“.

As a result the Kantian revolution re-formulated the tense relationship obtaining between reason and faith; that is – between philosophical speculation and revelation. At the root of this tension there

no longer lay a single theoretical context but rather the complex given relationships between moral and religious praxis, on the one hand, and the perceived commanding voices of religion and of ethics, on the other.

An important corollary of this aspect of the Kantian revolution is the redefinition of human existence as determined not so much on the basis of the human power to reason and theorize as on the perception of the human individual as an ethical subject subordinate to the moral law.

Franz Rosenzweig was a rebellious heir of the Western philosophical tradition in general and of the Kantian revolution in particular. He viewed the relationships between cognition and faith anew in the ethical as well as the metaphysical contexts. In the realm of theoretical reason, Rosenzweig – like Kant – limits the anticipated success of philosophical speculation in-so-far as for him it is anchored in a pre-cognitive ground; that is, in the „experience of factuality that is prior to all facts of actual experience“. But Rosenzweig owes a debt of gratitude to Kant in the realm of the ethical as well. For he understands human existence to be unique by virtue of what was previously described as the human ethical stance toward the world, even as he transcends the Kantian position by subsuming the ethical to the „meta-ethical“; thereby enabling him to speak of the human individual as one who not only stands in relation to the world but who may also stand in partnership with God, receive revelation, be transformed from „tragic hero“ to a „soul“, and become a soulful creator of human society who takes part in the process of Redemption through acts of love.

On this ground, Rosenzweig turns previous understandings of the relationship between faith and reason, including the immediately preceding Kantian (and Hegelian) understandings, on their head. Philosophy, for him, is no longer the „universal“ and „objective“ pole of that which revelation expresses merely in a subjective, personal manner, but is rather seen as a necessary anticipation, a „promise“ of that which faith will fully reveal and realize. Above all, for Rosenzweig, it is the verification of truth [die Bewährung der Wahrheit] in the after-math of revelation; that is, in the fullness of Christian and Jewish life, that becomes the heart of human ethos, replacing in his system the role which ethics has played in traditional philosophies.

Speculation regarding the notion of the good as the basis for ethics, either as an all-comprehensive metaphysical principal or as a

hypothesis of practical reason, is here substituted by an existentially known imperative of life, giving the most reliable testimony possible to the „share in truth“ that each individual and the community to which he or she belongs may be party to.

Revelation, for Rosenzweig, is the „I – Thou“ encounter with God. Faith is that form of re-orienting knowledge that stems from this encounter. It is here that faith opens doors that otherwise would be closed to philosophy. Rather than serve as a worthy but limited anticipation of that which philosophy will formulate in a complete and conceptualized manner, faith now provides the objectivity, stability and universality for that which philosophy would otherwise remain purely speculative and limited.

The unique view of Faith, Truth and Reason formulated by Rosenzweig is, of course, not only a product of his attempt to deal with the problems of modern philosophy left open by the Kantian and subsequent Hegelian systems, but also reflects the historical epoch in which he lived. His magnum opus, *The Star of Redemption*, as is well known, was written during and immediately following World War I. Substantially, however, it addresses many of the concerns taken up by the generation that came of age between the catastrophes of WWI and WWII. This is a generation that faced the threat of total collapse of culture, faith, humanism and ethics. It is a generation that was unable or uninterested in preventing the Holocaust and which was ultimately destined to witness Hiroshima.

Rosenzweig's philosophy is relevant and challenging for the coming generations who have no choice but to confront the task of rebuilding humanity and humanism, civilization and culture, experiencing once again the crumbling of human civilization while apparently lacking the philosophical orientation necessary to constitute a new and more constructive world order.

The questions of *Faith, Truth and Reason* stood at the heart of the *International Rosenzweig Society* conference that took place in Jerusalem during the summer of 2006. This was a summer which by the coincidence of history powerfully manifested in the painful mid-Eastern context the impact historical tragedy often has on human life and its sense of justice and faith.

The conference was convened by the Jerusalem based *Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion* and *The Schechter Institute of Jewish Studies* in conjunction with the Rosenzweig Minerva Center of Hebrew University and Haifa University. Israeli,

European, North and Latin American scholars gathered for three days to conduct a dialogue with each other, with Rosenzweig's philosophy as well as with the philosophical, cultural and theological efforts confronting parallel human issues in light of Rosenzweig's thought. For three days the external reality, otherwise so deeply present, was suspended in favor of an open philosophical discourse, aiming towards a better understanding of the human-condition and the fostering of a better human future.

This volume is based upon the papers presented at the conference along with their ensuing discussions. It also includes a number of articles written in the spirit of the conference in the years following that moment of grace. Its intended audience includes all those who view Rosenzweig's philosophy as inspiring, challenging and evocative, contributing to Rosenzweig scholarship and to contemporary philosophical discourse. Its intent is not only to reveal to the broader intellectual public the progress of dialogue with and through Rosenzweig, but also to give rise to further academic, philosophical and theological discourse that may lead to the formulation of a responsible notion of Faith, Truth and Reason for the contemporary period.

The editors wish to thank all authors who contributed their thought and scholarship to this volume and were exceptionally patient throughout the long period it took us to publish it. We are grateful to Hebrew Union College – Jewish Institute of Religion and its president Rabbi Professor David Ellenson who generously provided the financial means needed for the completion of this book. We also thank the presidium of the International Rosenzweig Society and its President Professor Doctor Myriam Bienenstock for their help and support. For the translation of the two articles that are based on papers presented in the public session of the conference that took place in Hebrew we thank Peretz Rodman. Last not least we express our gratitude to Lukas Trabert from the publishing house Alber and to Frank Hermenau for their ongoing support in producing this volume.

Yehoyada Amir, Jerusalem
Yossi Turner, Jerusalem
Martin Brassler, Luzern